

John Howe

A SERMON

Directing
What we are to do,

A F T E R

Strict Enquiry whether or no
we truly Love G O D.

Preached *April 29. 1688.*

The Second Edition.

L O N D O N ,

Printed for *Tho. Parkhurst*, at the *Bible and Three*
Crowns in *Cheapside*, near *Mercers-Chapel*.
1696.

The Epistle.

YOU may remember what a Solemn Awe was upon our Congregation lately at the Preaching of this ensuing Sermon, and that not a few tears drop'd at the hearing of it. This engaged some of us to entreat our Reverend Pastor, to give way, that by this Publication, it might be accommodated to your review. We know it is no more than one single Thred, that belongs to many other Discourses upon the same Subject, which have preceded, and to others, which we hope, will follow; but such as by your Notes and Memories may easily be wrought into the whole Piece: It is but a Thred, yet a golden one, and may contribute to the service of the Tabernacle, as in Exod. 25. We know it is a great condescension in him to suffer such an imperfect Piece to come abroad; but when the Reverend Dean of C. and other learned Persons of the Church of England, have denied themselves, by suffering such small Prints for the general good, we are persuaded, though he gave not a positive Judgment for it, he will not dislike that which is for your Service, and is intended to go no farther. Receive it therefore, read it over and over, and allot some times for the putting in practice the grand Examination urged upon us, and do your utmost to persuade all under your Roofs and Commands to do the like, that that which was Preached with so much holy Fervor and Affection, may beget in us and ours a bright flame of Divine Love to our good L O R D, to whom we commend you, and are

Your Affectionate Brethren
and Servants, &c.

John 5. 42. But I know you, that ye
have not the love of God in you.

YOU have heard several Discourses from this Scripture, and from another in the same Gospel: That we spoke to alternately with this at several times: *Thou knowest all things, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee,* c. 20. 17. and that which after Doctrinal Explication hath hitherto been insisted on, was an enquiry into the state of our own case in reference hereunto. Are we lovers of God in Christ, or are we not? There have been many things signified to you, by which this case might be discerned: And that which remains, and most naturally follows hereupon, is to direct you what you are to do, supposing your case, upon enquiry, to be this or that. Why such an enquiry, if it hath been attended to at all amongst us, it must have signified somewhat: It must, one would think, have some or other result, and what should we suppose it to result into, but either this, I do not love God, or I do? These are most vastly different Cases; it's a Tryal upon the most important Point that could have been discuss among us; and supposing there should be two sorts among us, the effect of it is as if a parting Line should be drawn through a Congregation, severing the living from the dead; here are so many living, and so many dead Souls: Indeed it is a very hard Supposition, to suppose that there should be any one in all this Assembly, that doth not love God: A very hard Supposition: I am extrely loth to

me is, not suppose it. For truly it were a very sad case that we should agree so far as we do in many other things, and not agree in this : That is, that we should agree so many of us to come all and meet together here in one place, agree to Worship God together, agree to sing his Praises together, to seek his Face together, to call upon his Name together, to hear his Word together, and not agree all to love God together : The God whom we worship, whom we invocate, whose Name we bear, and unto whom we all of us pretend : For who is there among us will say, I have no part in God ? And it were a most lovely thing, a most comely, desirable thing, that all such Worshipping Assemblies, even this Worshipping Assembly, at this time, and all times, could still meet together under this one common Notion, truly and justly *assumed*, as *so many lovers of God* : We are sure there will be an Assembly, a General Assembly, in which no one that is not a lover of God will be found, an Assembly of Glorious Angels, and of the Spirits of Just Men made perfect, a numerous, an innumerable Assembly, in which not one but a sincere lover of God. What a blessed thing were it, if our Assemblies on Earth were such ! But we cannot speak more gently, than to say, there is cause to fear they are not such : It hath been actually otherwise among a People professing the true Religion ; *They come before thee, and sit before thee as my People, and with their mouth shew much love with [their face] or in external appearance and shew [ore tenus :] they are lovers of God, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them*, Ezek. 33. 31. If such a Case hath been actually, it is still possible, and is still too much to be feared to be but too common a case.

But now supposing that there be different Cases amongst us ; in reference to these different Cases, there must be very different Deportments, and a very different management of our selves. This

Text more naturally leads me to direct what is to be done upon the Supposition of the sadder case, most deplorably sadder, *that one is no lover of God*; though we must be led on thereto by some things common to both cases.

Therefore that I may proceed by steps, this is requisite in the first place; that is, *that we make one Judgment of our case or another*; that is, that we bring the matter some way to a Judgment, not let so great a thing as this hang always in suspense: It's very plain, (a little to press this:) That,

First, While the case hangs thus in suspense, it suspends the proper subsequent Duty too that should follow hereupon: What canst thou do that is certainly fit and proper for thy own Soul, when thou dost not understand the state of its case? How canst thou guide thy course, or tell which way to apply or turn thy self? And,

Secondly, (to press it further) consider, That the not bringing, or omitting to bring this matter to a Judgment, if it proceed from indifference and neglect, speaks the greatest Contempt that can be, both of God and thine own Soul, the greatest that can be: That is now, supposing the Question be askt, *dost thou love God?* or *dost thou not?* And thou unconcernedly answerest, I can't tell, I don't know: Why, what to be carelessly ignorant whether thou lovest God, or lovest him not: There could not be a more concluding medium against thee, that thou dost not love him. It speaks thee at once to despise both God and thy self: What, to have this matter hang in indifference through neglect! whether thou lovest God, or lovest him not? It shews that neither regard to God, nor a just value of thy self makes thee care whether thou art an holy Man or a Devil. For know, that the loving God, or not loving him, does more distinguish a Saint from a Devil, than wearing a Body, or not wearing it, can do: A Devil if he did love God were a Saint. A Man that doth

not love God, he is no other, though he wear a Body, than an incarnate Devil: It's the want of love to God that makes the Devil a Devil, makes him what he is;

Secondly, For further Direction, *Take heed of passing a false Judgment in this case*, a Judgment contrary to the truth; for first, That's to no purpose, it will avail thee nothing; you can't be advantag'd by it; for yours is not the supremest Judgment: there will be another and superior Judgment to yours that will controul, and reverse your false Judgment, and make it signifie nothing, it is therefore to no purpose; And

Secondly, It is a great piece of Insolency, for it will be to oppose your Judgment to his certain and most authoriz'd Judgment: Who, if this be your case, hath already judg'd it, and tells you, *I know you, that you have not the love of God in you*. It belongs to him by Office to Judge. *The Father hath committed all Judgment to the Son*, as a little above in this Chapter: From what will you depose him? dethrone him? *disannul his Judgment? condemn him? that thou may be righteous?* (to borrow that Job 40. 8.)

Thirdly, It's most absurd supposing such Characters as you have heard, do conclude against a Man in this case, yet to judge himself a lover of God: If against the Evidence of such Characters a Man should pronounce the wrong Judgment, it would be the most unreasonable and absurd thing imaginable: For then let us but suppose how that wrong Judgment must lye, related to those fore-mention'd Characters that have been given you.

Let me remind you of some of them.

He that never put forth the Act of love to God, cannot say he hath the Principle.

He that is not inclin'd to do good to others for the sake of God, 1 John 3. 17.

He that indulges himself in the inconsistent love of this World, 1 John 2. 15.

He that lives not in obedience to his known Laws,
John 14. 15. 1 John 5. 3. (with many more.)

Now, if you will pass a Judgment of your case against the Evidence of such Characters, come forth then, let the matter be brought into clear light, put your sense into plain words, and this it will be.

I am a Lover of God, or I have the love of God in me, though I can't tell that ever I put forth one act of love towards him in all my Life; I have the love of God in me, though I never knew what it meant to do good to any for his sake, against the express words of Scripture: *How dwelleth the love of God in such a man?* I have the Love of God in me, though I have constantly indulged my self in that which he maketh an inconsistent love: Love not the World, nor the things which are in the World. *If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.* I have the love of God in me, though I would never allow him to Rule me, though I never kept his Commandments with a design to please him, and comply with his will: I have the love of God in me, though I never valued his Love: I have the love of God in me, though I never cared for his Image, for his Presence, for his converse, for his Interest and Honour: I beseech you consider how all this will sound! Can any thing be more absurdly spoken? And shall it be upon such improbabilities or impossibilities as these, that any Man will think it fit to venture his Soul! I'll pawn my Soul upon it, I'll run the hazard of my Soul upon it, I am a lover of God for all this? Would you venture any thing else so besides your Soul? Would you venture a Finger so? an Eye so? It's to place the name where there is nothing of the thing: It's to place the name of a thing upon its contrary: The Soul of Man can't be in an indifference towards God, but if there be not *love, propensity*; there is *aversion*, and that's *hatred*: And what, is *hatred* to be called *love*? If you bear that habitual disposition of Soul

towards God, to go all the day long with no inclination towards him, no thought of him, no design to please him, to serve him, to glorifie him: If this be your habitual temper, and usual course, will you call this Love? Shall this contrariety to the love of God be call'd *love* to him? You may as well call water fire, or fire water, as so grossly mis-name things here, and therefore again: In the

Third place: That we may advance somewhat: *Plainly and positively pass the true Judgment.* If the Characters that you have heard do carry the matter so, come at last plainly and positively to pass the *true Judgment* of your own case, though it be a sad one, and tell your own Souls: Oh my Soul, Though I must *sadly* say it, I must say it: All things conclude and make against thee: *The love of God is not in thee.* Why, is it not as good this should be the present issue at your own Bar, and at the Tribunal of your own Conscience, as before God's Judgment-Seat? Why should you not concur and fall in with Christ the authorized Judge? Whose Judgment is according to truth: Why, this is a thing that must be done, the case requires it, and God's express Word requires it, 1 Cor. 11.31. Other previous and preparatory Duty, plainly enjoyned, doth by consequence enjoyn it, and requires that it follow, 2 Cor. 13.5. What is Examination for, but in order to Judgment? It must therefore be done, and I shall shew how it must be done, and proceed to some farther Directions.

First, You must do it solemnly: Take your selves aside at some fit season or another: Inspect your own Souls, review your Life: Consider what your wonted frame and your ordinary course has been: And if you find by such Characters as heretofore were given, this is the truth of your case, then let Judgment pass upon deliberation, Oh my Soul! *Thou hast not the love of God in thee:* Whatsoever thine appearances hitherto have been: And what-

soever thy Peace and Quiet hath been, thou hast not the love of God in thee: Let it be done with Solemnity.

Secondly, Do it in the sight of God as before him, as under his Eye, as *under the Eye of Christ*: That Eye that is as a flame of fire, that searches Hearts, and tries Reins: Arraign thy self before him: Lord! I have here brought before thee a guilty Soul, a delinquent Soul, a wretched, an horrid delinquent, a Soul that was breathed into me by thee, an intelligent, understanding Soul, a Soul that hath love in its Nature, but a Soul that never loved thee.

Thirdly, Judge thy self before him *as to the fact, and as to the fault*: As to the fact, I have never yet loved thee, O God, I own it to thee: Lord! I accuse, I charge my Soul with this before thee, this is the truth of the fact, I have not the love of God in me: And charge thy self with the fault: Oh horrid Creature that I am! I was made by thee, and don't love thee: thou didst breath into me this reasonable immortal Spirit, and it doth not love thee: It is thy own Off-spring, and does not love thee: It can never be blessed in any thing but thee, and it does not love thee: And then hereupon in the

Fourth place, *Joy to this self-judging, self-loathing*: That we are to *Judge our selves*, is a Law laid upon us by the Supream Law-giver, the one Law-giver, that hath power to save, and to destroy: And his Word that enjoyns it, as plainly tells us what must go with it, that this self-judging must be accompanied with self-loathing, *Ezek. 6. 9. ch. 20. 43. and 36. 31.* Do God that right upon thy self, that thou mayest tell him, Blessed God! I do even hate my self, because I find I have not loved thee, and I cannot but hate my self, and I never will be reconciled to my self, till I find I am reconciled to thee: This is doing Justice: Doth not the Scripture usually and familiarly so represent to us the great turn of the Soul to God: When poor

sinners become Penitents, and return, that they are brought to hate themselves, and loath themselves in their own Eyes? And is there any thing that can make a Soul so loathsome in it self, or ought to make it so loathsome to it self, as not to love God, to be destitute of the love of God? And then,

* Fifthly, Hereupon too : *Pity thy self, pity thy own Soul*, there is cause to hate it, to loath it, and is there no cause to pity it? to lament it? Doth not this look like a lamentable case? Oh! what a Soul have I, that can love any thing else, that can love Trifles, that can love Impurities, that can love Sin: And can't love God, Christ, the most desirable good of Souls? What a Soul have I? What a Monster in the Creation of God is this Soul of mine! Methinks you should set your selves, if any of you can find this to be the case, to weep over your own Souls. Some may see cause to say: Oh my Soul, thou hast in thee other valuable things, thou hast Understanding in thee, Judgment in thee, Wit in thee; perhaps Learning, considerable acquired Endowments in thee; but thou hast not the love of God in thee: I can do many other commendable or useful things, I can Discourse plausibly, Argue subtilly, I can manage Affairs dexterously, but I can't love God: Oh my Soul, how great an Essential dost thou want to all Religion, to all Duty, to all Felicity! The one thing necessary thou wantest, thou hast every thing but what thou needest more than any thing, more than all things: And Oh my Soul, what is like at this rate to become of thee? Where art thou to have thy eternal abode? To what Regions of Horror, and Darkness, and Woe, art thou going? What Society can be fit for thee? No lover of God! No lover of God! what, but of Infernal accursed Spirits that are at utmost distance from him, and to whom no beam of holy vital Light shall ever shine to all Eternity: Thou, Oh my Soul, art self-abandon'd to the blackness of

Darkness for ever. Thy doom is in thy Breast, thy own Bosom: Thy *no-love to God* is thy own doom; thy eternal doom: Creates thee a present Hell, and shews whither thou belongest.

Sixth place: *Let a due fear and solicitude hereupon be set on work in thee*: For consider thy self as one shortly to be arraign'd before the Supreme Tribunal: And then here is the critical, vertical point upon which thy Judgment turns: Lovers of God; Or no Lovers of God: All are to be judged in reference to what they were and did in the Body, whether good or evil: As in 2 Cor. chap. 5: ver. 10. What wast thou as to this point, while thou wast in the Body? For the last Judgment regards that former state, what thou didst; and what was thy *wont* as to this whilst thou wast in the Body? Therefore by the way no hope, after thou art gone out of the Body: Go out of the Body, no lover of God, the departing Soul no lover of God, and this will be found your state at the Judgment-day: You are not to expect after Death a Gospel to be preach'd, that you may then be reconciled to God: No; but *what* did you do in the Body? According to that you are to be judged: Did you love God in this Body while here, yea or no? And this is a Tryal upon the most Fundamental Point: For as all the Law is comprehended in Love, as was formerly hinted, if you be found guilty in this Point, that you were no lover of God, totally destitute of the love of God, you were a perpetual underminer of his whole Government, of the whole frame of his Law, a Disloyal Creature, Rebellious and False to the God that made you, to Jesus Christ that redeemed you by his Blood: All Disobedience and Rebellion is summ'd up in this one word: *Having been no lover of God*: And won't it make any man's heart to meditate Terror, to think of having such a charge as this likely to lye against him in the Judgment of that day; that day, when the *secrets of all hearts*

are to be laid open? Every work must be then brought into Judgment, and every secret thing, whether it be good or evil: Eccles. 12. 14. And it will be to the confusion of many a one: It may be your no-love of God was heretofore a great Secret: You had a heart in which was no love of God, but it was a secret, you took not care to have it writ in your forehead; you convers'd with Men so plausibly, no body took you to be no lover of God, to have a heart disaffected to God: But now *out comes the Secret*, that which you kept for a great Secret all your days, *out comes the Secret*: And to have such a Secret as this disclosed to that vast Assembly before Angels and Men! Here was a Creature, a Reasonable Creature, an Intelligent Soul, that lived upon the Divine Bounty and Goodness so many Years in the World below, and hid a false disloyal Heart by a plausible shew, and external profession of great devotedness to God all the time of his abode in that World: Oh! What a fearful thing would it be to have this Secret so disclosed? And do you think that all the Loyal Creatures that shall be Spectators and Auditors *in the hearing* of that great day, will not all conceive a just and a loyal Indignation against such a one when convicted of not loving God, convicted of not loving him that gave him breath, him whose he was, to whom he belonged, whose name he bore? What a fearful thing will it be to stand convicted so upon such a Point as this? And sure in the mean time there's great reason for continual fear why a man's heart should *meditate terror*: One would even think that all the Creation should be continually every moment in Arms against him: One would be afraid that every Wind that blows should be a deadly blast to destroy me: That when the Sun shines upon me, all its beams should be turn'd into vindictive flames, to execute vengeance upon me! I would fear that even the very stones in the streets should fly against me, and every thing that meets me be my death.

What, to go about the Streets from day to day with a heart void of the love of God! What a heart have I? Fear ought to be exercised in this case: We are bid to fear if we do evil against an Humane Ruler: *If thou do that which is evil, be afraid, for he bear-eth not the Sword in vain, Rom. 13. 4.* But if I be such an evil doer against the Supreme Ruler, the Lord of Heaven and Earth: Have I not reason to be afraid? And to think sadly with my self what will the end of this be? But yet I will add in the

Seventh place: *Don't despair for all this: God is in Christ reconciling the World to himself: As in that 2 Cor. chap. 5. v. 19. that sin might not be imputed: He is in Christ to reconcile you to win Hearts, to captivate Souls to the love of God; For what else is Reconciliation on our part? He is in Christ to reconcile, to conquer Enmity, to subdue disaffected Hearts, to make such Souls call and cry, My Lord, and my God! I have been a stranger to thee: I will through thy grace be so no longer, therefore don't despair: Despair that ever you should do well without loving of God: But don't despair you shall ever be brought to love him by no means: You have to do with him that is the Element of Love, the God of Love, the Fountain of Love, the great Source of Love, the Fountain at once both of Loveliness and Love, whose Nature is Love, and is with his name in his Son, who was manifested in the Flesh full of Grace and Truth, i.e. sincerest love. He was incarnate Love, Love pointed at us, and is upon these terms able to transform all the World into Love; the Nature of God is all Love, 1 John 4. 16. and in Christ, he is Emanuel, God with us, so the Divine Love hath a direct aspect upon us: Why then apply your selves to him: Turn your selves towards him, open your Souls to him; say to him, Lord, flow in with all the mighty Powers of thine own Love upon my Soul, thou that*

the true genuine Sons of *Abraham*, and there can be no such Children, without Love : Oh dissolve this stone, this stone in my Breast, mollifie this obdurate Heart, turn it into Love ! How soon may it be done upon due application ! He can quickly do it, draw thee into a Love-Union with himself, so as that thou shouldest come to dwell in Love : And dwell in God, who is Love : And he in thee : Then the Foundations are surely laid, for all thy future Duty, and for all thy future Felicity : Then how pleasantly wilt thou obey, and how blessedly wilt thou enjoy God for ever ! But such application must be made *through Christ*, and *for the Spirit* : Which Spirit is the Spirit of Love, and of Power, and of a sound Mind, as you have it in that first of the second to *Tim. v. 7.* But these things I can't now further insist upon.

F - I - N - I - S.

Books written by the Reverend Mr. John Howe, and Sold by Tho. Parkhurst, at the Bible and Three Crowns in Cheapside.

1. OF Thoughtfulness for the Morrow; with an Appendix concerning the immoderate desire of fore-knowing things to come.
2. Of Charity, in reference to other mens sins.
3. The Redeemer's Tears wept over lost Souls, in a Treatise on *Luke 19. 41, 42.* With an Appendix, wherein somewhat is occasionally discoursed concerning the Sin against the Holy Ghost, and how God is said to will the Salvation of them that perish.
4. Two Sermons Preach'd upon these words, *Yield your selves to God.*
5. A Sermon directing what we are to do, after a strict Enquiry whether or no we truly love God.
6. A Funeral Sermon for Mrs. *Esther Sampson*, the late Wife of *Henry Sampson*, Doctor of Phyfick, who died Novemb. 24th. 1689.
7. The Carnality of Religious Contention, in two Sermons, Preach'd at the Merchant's Lecture in Broadstreet.
8. A Calm and Sober Enquiry concerning the possibility of a Trinity in the Godhead; in a Letter to a Person of Worth.
9. A Letter to a Friend, concerning a Postscript to the Defence of Dr. *Sherlock*'s Notion of the Trinity in Unity, relating to the Calm Enquiry.
10. A View of that Part of the late Considerations address'd to *H.H.* about the Trinity, which concerns the Calm and Sober Enquiry on the same Subject.
11. A Funeral Sermon on the Death of that Pious Gentlewoman, Mrs. *Judith Hamond*, late Wife of the Reverend Mr. *George Hamond*, Minister of the Gospel in *London*.

Some other Books Printed for, and Sold by Tho.
Parkhurst at the Bible and Three Crowns in
Cheapside.

A Body of Practical Divinity, consisting of above 176 Sermons on the Lesser Catechism, composed by the Reverend Assembly of Divines at Westminster; with a Supplement of some Sermons on several Texts of Scripture. By Tho. Watson, formerly Minister of St. Stephen's Walbrook, London. Recommended by 26 Ministers to Masters of Families, and others. Folio.

Sermons and Discourses on several Divine Subjects; by the late Reverend and Learned David Clarkson, B. D. and sometime Fellow of Clare-Hall, Cambridge. With an Epistle by Mr. John Howe, and Mr. Matth. Mead. Folio.

The Grace and Duty of being Spiritually-minded declared, and Practically improved. By John Owen, D. D. Quarto.

A Practical Exposition on the 130 Psalm, wherein the Nature of Forgiveness of Sin is declared, the Truth and Reality of it asserted; and the case of a Soul distressed with the guilt of Sin, and relieved by a discovery of Forgiveness with God, is at large discoursed. By John Owen, D. D. Quarto.

An Exposition, with Practical Observations upon the Book of Ecclesiastes. By Mr. Alexander Nisbet, Minister of the Gospel at Irwin. Quarto.

Theological Discourses, in Two Parts: The First, Containing Eight Letters, and Three Sermons concerning the Blessed Trinity. The Second, Discourses and Sermons on several Occasions. By John Wallis, D. D. Professor of Geometry in Oxford. Quarto.